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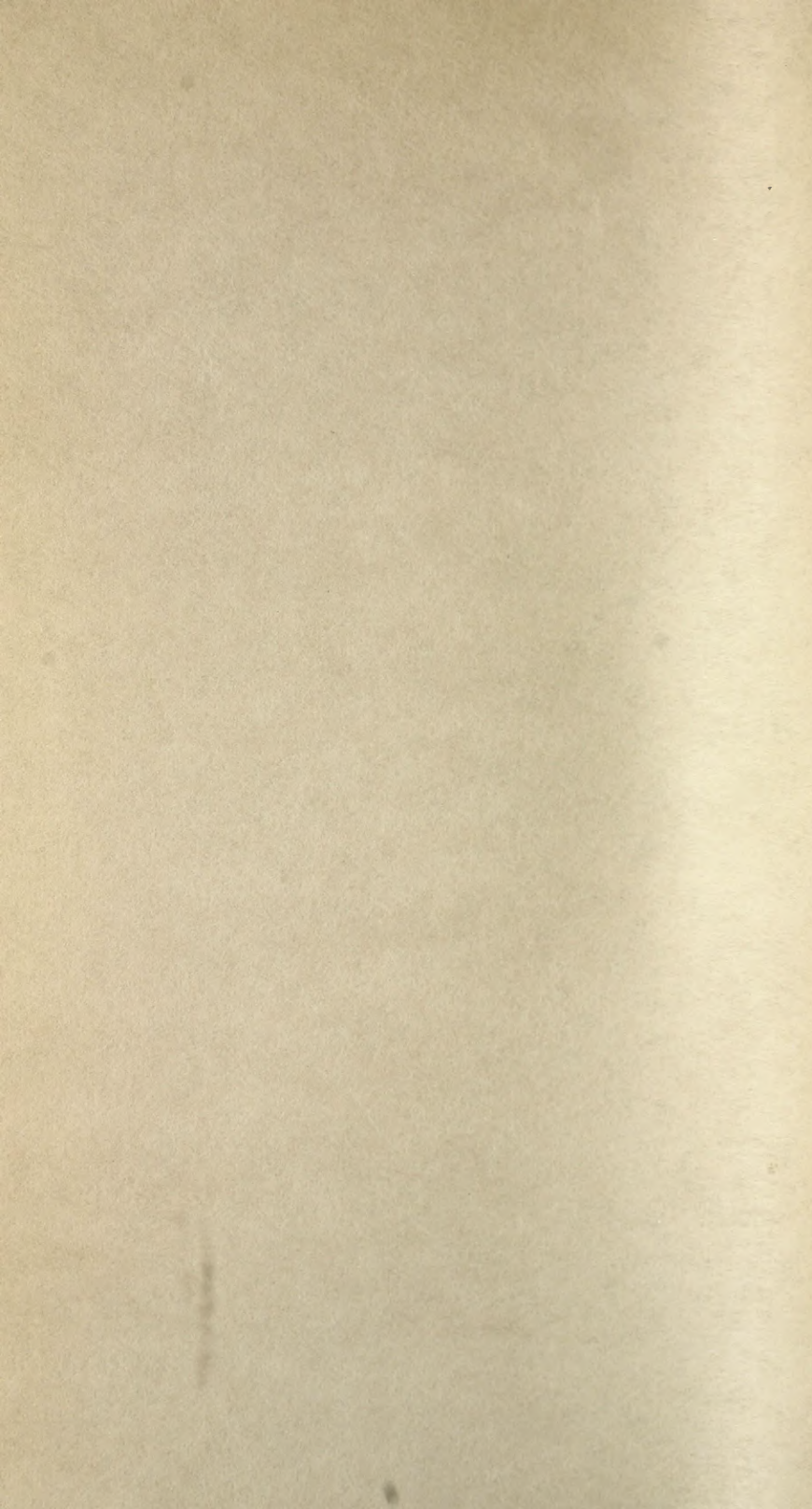
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ADDRESS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SUPERINTENDENCE OF
THE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION, AT
WASHINGTON, D. C.

By

Sidney Michael Finger



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ADDRESS

TO THE

DEPARTMENT OF SUPERINTENDENCE OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION, AT WASHINGTON, D. C.,

ON THE

EDUCATIONAL AND RELIGIOUS INTERESTS OF THE
COLORED PEOPLE OF THE SOUTH,

BY

S. M. FINGER,

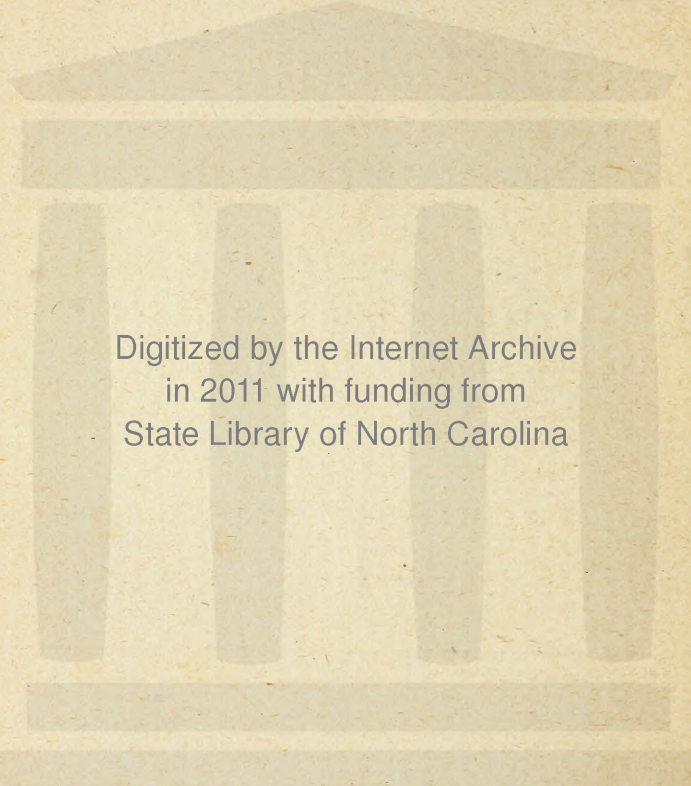
SUPERINTENDENT PUBLIC INSTRUCTION OF NORTH CAROLINA.

FEBRUARY 24, 1886.

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THE EDUCATIONAL AND RELIGIOUS INTERESTS

OF THE

Colored People of the South.

Since the storms that beat upon our ship of State subsided, we find her anchored in the harbor of freedom and equality of all men before the law. Twenty-one years have elapsed, and as the clouds clear away, it becomes us to take our reckonings. Almost a generation has passed away, and other men control and other ideas prevail. It is wise that we lay aside all sectional feelings, and without crimination or recrimination discuss all the great problems that confront us, and especially the negro problem, which I submit is, perhaps, the most difficult of them all. I desire to have it understood that in anything I shall say it is furthest from my purpose to offend any man, white or black, North or South.

Born and reared in the South, having a Southern ancestry ante-dating the revolution of 1775, the son and the grandson of an owner of slaves, I have had opportunity of studying the negro in his home in the South before and since the late war between the States.

Educated in New England, and having had business intercourse with the people of the Northern section of the Union, I have had opportunity of studying the negro in the North also, both before and since his freedom.

Add to this the fact that I was taught by my father to look with suspicion upon the institution of slavery, and that consequently I had a degree of sympathy for the slaves.

In view of these facts, I trust that I can enter upon the discussion of the negro question, with freedom from prejudice.

against the colored people, and with sufficient opportunity to have learned something about them from actual contact, and to enable me to keep up with changing public sentiment about the negro, both North and South.

But with all these opportunities to study and observe the negro, I am free to confess that I do not know that I fully understand him; and I cannot, with satisfaction to myself, forecast his future or form a definite conclusion as to his capabilities. So far he is an undetermined quantity in the problem of civilization. Whether the size of his brain and his other peculiarities mark him as the white man's natural inferior, or only emphasize his want of opportunity, is an unanswered question, and it must remain an unanswered question until he shall have been tried and cultivated for more than one generation.

It is, however, but fair to state that when we consult history, any claim of the negro, or of any other of the colored nations, to equality in intellect or force of character with the Indo-European nations rests upon a very slender foundation. History shows that the Aryan family of nations overcame all other nations with whom they came in contact. So far as the negroes in Africa were concerned, the grand, ancient civilization around the shores of the Mediterranean sea did not stir them. While the Egyptians built the pyramids and their magnificent cities; while the Carthaginians grappled in successful conflict with the Romans; while the Greeks and Romans made their arts of war and their fine arts felt and known throughout the then known world; while in later days, even down to the present, civilization and christianity have been developed by the European and American people—while all these things have been going on, the negroes in Africa have never, to any considerable extent, been aroused by them, notwithstanding in modern times special efforts have been made to civilize and christianize them. History is against the claims of the negro to equality with the white nations. He would seem to be immovable, incapable of pro-

gress except as he is brought into immediate personal contact with the whites.

However this may be, the white people of the Southern section of the United States, as well as those of the Northern, desire to give him a fair trial. In this, there seems now to be very fair unanimity of sentiment. So far as *the thing to be done* is concerned, there is not much diversity of opinion. He is a citizen, equal before the law to any other citizen in all the States of this Union. The conclusion is, therefore, irresistible that he must be educated, intellectually, industrially and religiously, not alone for his benefit, but for the protection of our government.

But when we come to consider *how* this is to be done, intelligent and good people have different plans and theories. These plans and theories have foundation in the minds of those who hold them according to the glasses through which the negro is seen. One man sees in him capabilities equal to those of the white man, and he fits his plans and theories of education to his estimate of the negro's *natural* ability. Another man sees the negro as an *inferior* being and he fits *his* plans and theories to his belief. Still another man sees him as an untried and unknown factor in civilization, now far behind in intelligence, morality and religion, and so *his* ideas as to how to educate him take shape.

It is exceedingly interesting to watch these ever changing and developing views about the negro himself, and the consequent ever changing and developing plans and theories as to how is the best plan to deal with him and educate him, both for his own benefit and for the benefit of the white people. Indeed, the whole matter would be amusing if we could forget the exceeding importance of the problem.

One man says "the race line is providential, and therefore it ought to be perpetuated." Another replies, but the race line has already been broken down, and he goes on to argue that all laws that favor the separation of the races in schools and all laws that forbid intermarriage between the races ought to be repealed. He says that no harm would come to the body-politic by allowing

intermarriage, *because there would be very little of it anyhow*. Thus one of the reasons urged why intermarriage should not be forbidden, serves to show that *legitimate social instincts* have been given to the races by their Creator, which will perpetuate the race line in spite of law. Still another man says, this race question can never be settled until by intermarriage between the races the white race is made to absorb the colored race; and he advocates mixed schools and mixed churches, because he thinks this policy will lead to mixed marriages. I repeat that these different views would be *amusing* if it were not for the momentous consequences involved in the adoption of a correct policy—such a policy as will be right in the highest sense of that word, and as will be for the best interests of both races.

Whether or not the negro is *naturally* equal or inferior to the whites is disputed, but his equality or inferiority need not now enter into the discussion as to how he should be educated. In a practical point of view, there is *common* ground enough to stand upon. The ground upon which this discussion should proceed is *his real status now*. We should recognize his intellectual and moral condition as it is, and not too eagerly inquire what it will be after some generations of training shall have been given him. The future will take care of itself if we faithfully take care of the present.

Let us now inquire what his real status is. I do not think that any man who has not lived in the South for many years and observed the negro in his country home, as well as in the cities and towns, will be likely fully to understand his real condition, intellectually, morally and religiously. He may read all the literature touching upon it; he may travel through the South, and even sojourn for years in the South, and not comprehend it. Far the greater part of the negroes live in the country, on the plantations, and a traveller would be apt to form his opinions by what he saw in the cities and towns, where the most intelligent of the negroes congregate, and where their educational and religious opportunities are better than in the country. One who sees the negro in the cities and towns only will fail fully to comprehend

his condition, even if he is free from any preconceived opinions about it.

Consider the case as it is. A race of the most barbarous people on the face of the earth, and perhaps the most ignorant, brought to the United States but a few generations ago at most; sunk into the lowest depths of heathenism; bound in all their worship by the most abject fear and degrading superstition; subjected to slavery without any effort, worth the name, to cultivate their intellects; suddenly released from their bondage in the condition of paupers; suddenly made citizens equal before the law to their old masters, who had been civilizing and developing for a thousand years; taught for twenty years in the bad school of politics; embittered against their former owners and for a time virtually ruling them; with only a few years of limited education by the impoverished South—with this history and this treatment, what, in the very nature of the case, must be their condition and disposition now even if we assume their natural equality with the whites? Let any intelligent man free himself from any preconceived notions and answer as his reason dictates.

We could but expect them to be ignorant still; averse to labor, and so still living in poverty; ruled largely by superstition and fear in their worship; without providence for the future, spending their earnings, day by day as they receive them, if not for the necessities of life, for its pleasures and frivolities; inclined to immorality; the present generation, in large part, growing up in idleness and worthlessness because of their surroundings and home life.

These surroundings and home life are, as a rule, of the most unfavorable kind. In the country as well as in the cities and towns, in many cases, whole families—fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters—live in small houses, often containing but one room, the parents exercising no restraint or an impatient and passionate restraint over their children, and the children having no elevating companionship. Of course there are exceptions, but I am not now noting the exceptions. With such surroundings in the formative, family life of the colored children

before they reach the school age, and with such companionship, they have a most unfavorable start for the formation of character. Add to these home influences the physical inheritances transmitted to them—inheritances that are apparent to the sight—and add to these still the inheritances of mind and soul which are invisible to mortal sight, but which are no less real than the physical, and we can have some appreciation of the real condition of these children.

I have drawn the general picture. I am glad that I can note many exceptions. As we visit the hotels and barber shops, we find almost all the service performed by well-behaved, intelligent and decent colored persons, whose very service has brought the elevating contact with the white people, just as it does in the Northern States. Then, too, we have in the South a large number of old negroes, industrious and well-behaved—good men and women. The schools have elevated quite a goodly number into respectable teachers and preachers, and some have advanced in other walks of life. But all of these compose but comparatively a small proportion of the great mass.

In this connection, it should be noted, too, that in those sections of the South, where the farms were small before the slaves were freed, and where the whites labored with the slaves, the negroes are far more advanced in intelligence, good manners and good morals, than are those who lived on the large cotton, rice, and sugar plantations. The difference is marked both as to the older negroes and their children; but I cannot now examine the different sections of the South in detail. I have time to draw only a general picture of what the negro's condition is in the South, and I desire to draw it strictly in the light of facts, and in making this list of exceptions, I am willing to leave a number of blank pages to be filled by any person to suit his section; and still the general picture, as I have drawn it, will be found substantially true. I am willing to concede that the negroes, as a whole, are improving slowly intellectually, and yet I want to impress the fact that the great mass of them is at the bottom round of the

ladder of civilization, and that there are hereditary tendencies which any proper system of education must take into consideration.

One of the great mistakes many Northern teachers made when they came South and took charge of colored schools was not to take note of these hereditary tendencies, both physical and mental—and the result was that the moral development of their pupils did not keep pace with their intellectual development. Some of these Northern teachers, who have had charge of colored schools for years, now understand the real status of the negro children as to intelligence and character, and they hesitate about training their own children in association with them in the school room.

These teachers had seen the negro in the North only, where the brightest of them had found their homes before the war; where they did not number one in fifty of the population; where, from the very fact of there being comparatively so few of them, contact with the whites was a necessity in the daily labor of the negroes, because, wherever they turned to find employment, they rubbed against the whites; where they had the very best opportunities that any people so low down in the scale of civilization ever had in the whole history of the world; where, on account of the comparative smallness of their numbers, they had no appreciable effect upon the multitude of superior white people; where the one negro child, elevated by constant contact in every-day life with white people, had been educated with a multitude of white children without any appreciable deleterious effect upon them. These teachers, with ideas about the negro formed by what they saw of him under such circumstances, came South and expected to deal with him in the same way they had dealt with him North. After years of labor, many of them, I think, are discouraged with the slow progress their pupils have made, especially in the development of character.

Aristotle wisely said, twenty-two hundred years ago, the same education will not produce the same virtues in different persons, for the formation of character in each person is dependent upon

three things—nature, habit and instruction. This was true as applied then to the progressive Greeks, and it is true as applied to all people. Shall we not recognize it now as applied to the negroes? Shall we attempt to educate the negroes of the South in the same school-room with the whites? Shall we ignore the fact that the *nature* and *habits* of the colored children are widely different from the nature and habits of the white children? Shall a false philanthropy cause us to attempt to do an unnatural and an impossible thing?

Many things have been done since the war that have been damaging to the educational and religious interests of the negro. The passions of the hour ran so high that we went to work to advance him to a position far beyond what he was prepared for. He was given the ballot of which he was not worthy. He was taught that to be free he must leave his old master's premises, if only to remove to an adjoining plantation; that he must leave his old master's church and organize a church of his own; that education was a panacea for all the ills of life; that he must have teachers and preachers of his own color; that the southern people would, if they could, put him back into slavery.

The color line was drawn in this way, and to a large extent it is kept up yet. Because of prejudices growing out of their bondage, and because the southern people resisted giving them the ballot at the time it was done and in the way it was done, it was easy to align the negroes against the whites in politics and to separate them from the whites in every other way. This separation lessened their contact with the whites and set them back in a religious point of view because of the dense ignorance of those who assumed the office of preachers. In this respect they yet suffer great loss, for in very many cases their preachers are still densely ignorant and the preaching is unmeaning words—mere sound and fury.

But the prejudices between the two races, which was perhaps stronger on the part of the negroes against the whites than on the part of the whites against the negroes, are breaking down;

and I do not think it will be long until a much better state of feeling will exist between them. What I desire specially to say in this connection, is that the American people have been pursuing a wrong policy with the negro, in that they have placed him in an unnatural state of advancement, and have spoiled him.

The negro's burden as a slave was *forced* labor; to him, freedom and the ballot and education meant exemption from manual labor, especially with such teaching and treatment as I have alluded to. With all this history as slaves and as freemen and citizens, and with their ignorance, it could but be expected that many of the negroes would become more and more worthless as laborers, and that their children would be trained to avoid labor as the curse of curses, and so be more worthless than their parents. The negro's head, so to speak, has been turned, by the very novelty of his new condition.

In proportion, however, as they have been properly educated and have been led to see their condition as it is, and have learned that their freedom is secure, and that the white people of the South mean to assist them to such degree of elevation as they may prove worthy of, they become more contented. The state of feeling towards the whites is continually growing better. So, too, the white people are more and more adapting themselves to the situation. More and more there is a settled conviction that not only are the negroes citizens, and here to stay, but that they are best adapted to development of, at least, the agricultural possibilities of the South. With a judicious system of education, and with just such treatment as they may merit from time to time, they will improve and make valuable citizens. Just now it is of the utmost importance that a determined effort shall be made to properly train the negro children in schools and Sunday-schools, and to improve the home life of the colored people, and to inspire them with a higher idea of the Christian religion. Not only is this of the utmost importance, but it is a work of the utmost difficulty, and one in which the white people must guide.

In my judgment we must have not only separate schools for

the colored people, but also separate churches; and these schools and churches must be taught and ministered to by colored teachers and preachers so far as colored people will prepare themselves to fill these offices. This is so because both races, as a whole, want it so; and because the relative condition of the races make it a necessity. Any attempt at a general system of mixed schools and mixed churches would be a signal failure.

I know that some philanthropists claim that no aid should be given to schools or churches in the south except upon the condition of opening the doors to both races. They have a theory that must not be departed from. Judging them by their words and acts, they believe it to be wrong—a sin—to open a school for the colored people and at the same time not allow the white people to patronize it; also, that it is wrong to open a school for the white people and not allow the colored people to attend it. Likewise, they hold the same belief in reference to churches. They believe in the promiscuous mixing of the races in the churches, and in many cases this course is urgently advised.

The result of this teaching has been a continual clashing of the races, and it has threatened to break down the public schools of the south.

In some sections of the south, strong efforts have been made to establish mixed congregations for public worship, and the colored people have been invited and even urged to join the white congregations, but they almost invariably refuse to do it as long as there is a colored congregation in the neighborhood. I see it stated that quite recently the Florida Conference of the M. E. Church North divided on the color line, forming two conferences in the same territory, one white and one colored. In making this division it was argued that this step had become a necessity for the progress of this church in the south. Thus slowly is the truth dawning upon men's minds that these races are so different in nature and habits that they are not now suited for such associations.

The colored people really prefer to have their schools and churches separate from those of the whites, and whites demand

that their schools and churches shall be separate from those of the colored people.

This disposition of the races to separate from each other is explained by those who advocate mixed schools and mixed churches by saying that at the bottom of the whole matter *is race prejudice*. Those who advocate separation say that this disposition rests upon *legitimate social instincts*, and not upon *race prejudice*. Whatever is the true explanation, the *fact* is hardly disputed by any intelligent person, and as a *fact* it must govern our policy.

The most intelligent of the colored people know that the policy of mixed schools would inevitably break down the whole public school system of the South, and so deprive them of the educational opportunities which they now have at public expense. They know, too, that a policy of mixed schools means that *white* teachers, and not *colored* ones, would be employed if such a policy could be adopted without breaking down the schools entirely. They know, too, that mixed churches means *white* ministers and not colored ones.

If the colored people are to make progress they must, as far as practicable, be thrown upon their own efforts, educationally and religiously, as well as in a material point of view. In these particulars the same rule applies as in the whole animal and vegetable economy—*effort* and *exercise*. The colored people can never be made to stand alone unless they are encouraged to depend upon their own efforts and resources. Mixed schools and mixed churches inevitably take away the occupation of colored teachers and colored preachers, and continue the colored people's dependence upon the whites. There may be mixed schools and mixed congregations presided over by *colored* teachers and *colored* preachers, but, if so, I do not know where they are.

I do not mean to say that the colored people are far enough advanced, educationally, morally or religiously, to stand alone, and to make further progress in these particulars without the assistance and guidance of the whites. Indeed, I am free to say

that I do not believe they are. I think it is evident now that if all assistance by the whites and all contact with them were withdrawn, the colored people, in the aggregate, would go backward instead of forward.

One thing, however, is very much to the negro's advantage: his faculty of imitation is very strongly developed. He seems naturally to imitate his white neighbors and to follow their guidance, especially when he is not controlled by prejudice. Therefore everything but principle should be conceded by the whites in order to break down all prejudice. That done, the whites will have access to the colored people and will be able to guide them. Then good examples will be imitated and good instruction will be heeded; then will the whites be able more successfully to teach colored teachers and colored preachers, and to gather colored children into Sunday-schools and instruct them in the principles of morality and the Christian religion.

But the colored people must be encouraged in every practicable way to help themselves. Just as a child, when being taught to walk, does not learn to walk, no matter how much its mother may help it, until it puts forth its own powers and tries to help itself; just so must the colored people, weak as they are, be led by the whites, but in such way as to cause them to try—cause them to call into exercise all their powers. In accordance with this principle, I think it best for them to have teachers and preachers of their own color so long as they may want them.

By pursuing this course, the two races can, I believe, live in the South together in peace, each helping the other; and there will be some field of intellectual work open to the negro. In this country, where there are seven whites to one negro, with such a wide difference between them in every way, it is not reasonable to suppose that there can ever be any considerable field for intellectual work for the negro unless he finds it among his own people. Without some opportunity to exercise his intellectual faculties, he will soon be discouraged and lose his appetite for education, and become a mere serf or peon. Already there are signs of discouragement. As the negroes realize that labor

is a necessity, and that education does not free them from it, they relax their efforts and are not so anxious to send their children to school; and under any system that will be practicable to adopt, we will see more and more of this as time rolls along. They, however, have a commendable race pride. They have always been dependent upon the whites, and the whites have always claimed that this dependence was natural and necessary for the welfare of both races, and have always claimed superiority. In more ways than one, since the war, the negroes have been taught that they are not naturally inferior to the whites, and that all they lack of being equal to the whites is education and a proper sense of self-dependence, or rather independence. Even if this is not so, their believing it stimulates their race pride, and makes them struggle harder to advance. This is very much to their advantage upon the principle, universally acknowledged, that a faithful trial is half the battle in every enterprise, and with all people. I think, therefore, that so long as the negroes prefer teachers and preachers of their own race, they ought to be encouraged in their preference, provided colored persons will qualify themselves for the work; but there must be a rigid superintendence of all school work by the whites.

From another standpoint, I insist that this is the correct policy. The negro's prejudice against the whites of the South, has been intense for two reasons; (1) because he was held in the bondage of slavery, and (2) because in the days of reconstruction, the whites resisted his being allowed to vote. These prejudices will sooner be broken down by allowing freedom of action in all particulars where no wrong principle is involved. To accomplish this end, it is better to allow them reasonably competent teachers of their own race, even if, for the time being, better qualified white teachers could be employed to serve them. After perfectly friendly relations are established, and after the negroes see that it may be better for them to have white teachers, they will seek them—then plenty will be found to serve them.

I have said that there are signs of discouragement among the negroes, because freedom, the ballot, and education have not

brought the beneficial results which they so confidently expected. So, too, many of the white people are also discouraged. Out of their poverty, the Southern States are spending for the education of the negroes perhaps as much as five million dollars per annum, without satisfactory results. In this work, both the Southern negroes and the Southern whites deserve the encouragement of Congressional aid. But that question I do not propose to argue at length; it seems to me to be a self-evident proposition. It will encourage the negroes as well as the whites, and it should be given in such way as to allow a part to be used for building and furnishing school houses. Comfortable and well furnished houses are necessities, and of such the South is very sadly in need. The aid now proposed by Congress is confessedly mainly for the South, and I can see no good reason why it should be limited to the payment of teachers' salaries. It should, by all means, be put into the school treasuries of the States, and be used in common with State funds for all school purposes. If Congress will consent to encourage the school workers of the South by extending this aid, let it be done in such way as not to hamper them.

If it were not for the negroes, the Southern States would not need this aid and would not ask it, and if it were not for the negroes no member of Congress would propose it. It is due to the south in common fairness, and the people of the south have shown that they are in earnest in educating the negroes and are worthy of it. I honor northern men who favor it, and I am surprised at southern men who oppose it. I honor northern men more who favor it without hampering restrictions, and I am the more surprised at southern men who oppose it when it is proposed that the funds shall be managed by State authorities.

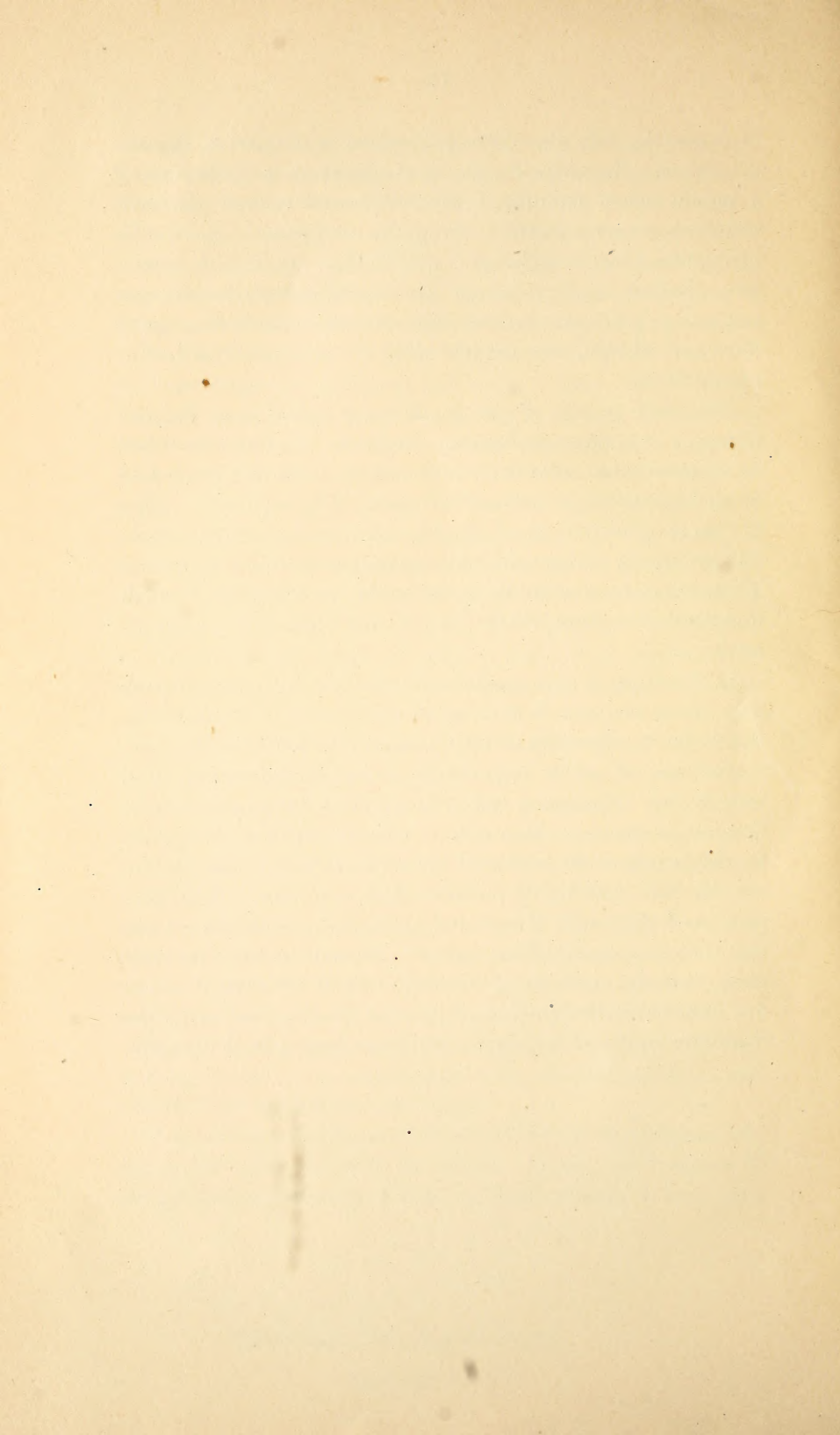
So far as the question of civil rights as distinguished from social privileges, is concerned, that is fast working itself out, and the less force applied to it the better.

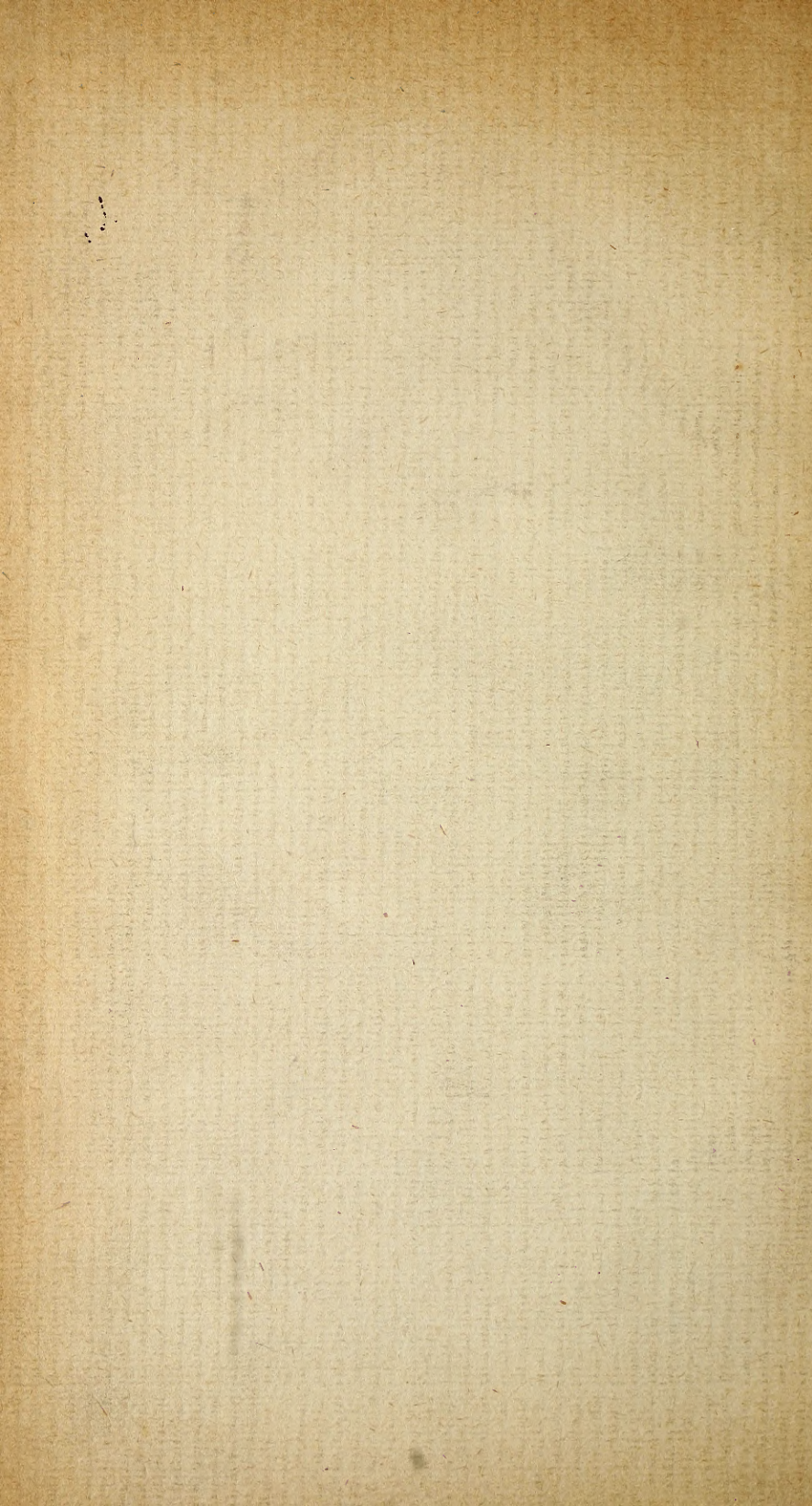
It is no unusual thing now in the South to find negroes riding in first class cars with the whites. I have seen negroes in the political conventions of both political parties; I have seen

them serving with the whites as jurymen in the trial of important causes. Recently, in a city of the South, at the dedication of a public school building, I saw white and colored aldermen seated on the same rostrum during the ceremonies. In all such intercourse proper conduct and qualifications can be made requisites. Indeed, in all social and semi-social intercourse the correct policy is to apply as little force as possible, and let people's likes and dislikes and the free spirit of our republican institutions control.

The white people of the South insist rigidly upon but two things as to intercourse between the races. 1. That there shall be separate public schools for both races, and (2) that there shall be no inter-marriages between the races. The negroes, or rather the too sanguine friends of the negroes, who do not know them, will act wisely if they will make no contest on these two points. These are matters of public policy which the States have a right to control, and about which there is almost unanimity of sentiment.

In this paper I have spoken of education in a general way only, using the term in its broadest signification. While education in books, especially in the fundamental branches of English, is, perhaps, of prime importance, industrial education is of scarcely less importance, and it is pressing for proper recognition in our systems. How and to what extent it can be applied for the benefit of the negroes I cannot now discuss more than to say that it is most highly probable that an unusually large proportion of them will always find their places on the farms, and that therefore special efforts ought to be made to teach them the most improved methods of farming. Farm life is itself a very fine industrial school, and as the general farming interests of the South are improved the negroes will share largely in the benefits.







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